

Bipartisan energy conference showcases governors from 5 states

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SALT LAKE CITY (AP) - Several governors called for national leadership on energy self-sufficiency and said the West could lead the way in clean-fuel technologies.

"We need someone to stand up in this country and say this is the priority," said **Utah** Gov. Jon Huntsman, a Republican and host of Monday's energy conference attended by the Democratic governors of Wyoming and Montana.

Two other governors, from Nevada and West Virginia, joined by video link in a discussion meant to put pressure on the federal government. The National Governors Association has offered specific proposals for congressional action this year.

"We all have a stake in the outcome of energy security," Nevada's Republican Gov. Jim Gibbons said from Carson City.

The governors said more research and development is needed to secure the nation's future. They support incentives for clean-coal technology working off the nation's abundance of coal reserves, a 250-year supply at current consumption rates.

They agree on curbing greenhouse gases, and they say any effort must start with energy conservation and efficiency and improvements to neglected transmission systems.

Wyoming Gov. Dave Freudenthal said while he didn't have much faith in Washington, D.C. -- "I have strong objections to almost everything they do" -- the federal government needs to take a leading role in energy self-sufficiency.

There's only so much the states can do, he said.

"As we say in Wyoming, you want to be careful not to get too far ahead of your headlights," Freudenthal said.

The Salt Lake City conference, which ends Tuesday, is in part a showcase for new technologies that capture solar and wind power and promise to economically convert the West's coal, oil shale and tar sands into liquid fuels.

Until the nation develops alternative energy supplies, American troops could be fighting overseas for generations to secure the nation's supplies of foreign oil, said Montana Gov. Brian Schweitzer said.

"We have the technology. We have the energy. We have the obligation," Schweitzer said. "Do we have the resolve? I think we do, and it's time."

The conference also heard from Gov. Joe Manchin, a Democrat from the coal state of West Virginia. He was shown on a big video screen with a panel of energy company executives.

Manchin has been trying to persuade the rest of the nation's governors that individual states should start taking steps to eliminate their dependence on foreign energy instead of waiting for the federal government.

The idea comes out of Manchin's involvement with the Southern States Energy Board and his promotion of a Declaration of Energy Independence.

The 18-member energy board's idea of independence centers on using coal, oil shale and plant products to replace imported crude oil by 2030.